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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003482

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TAGS: PHUM MOPS PGOV ET  
SUBJECT: (C) OGADENI ELDERS DETAIL RAMPANT HUMAN RIGHTS  
ABUSES

REF: ADDIS 3466

Classified By: DCM Deborah Malac for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

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¶11. (C) In a series of private discussions on the margins of a December 1-2 pastoralist conference held in Ethiopia's Somali region (reftel), reliable senior Ogadeni elders reported to Deputy Political Counselor and USAID Officer (EmbOffs) a disturbing pattern of widespread, systemic human rights abuses by Ethiopian Government (GoE) and Ethiopian military (ENDF) forces in the Ogaden. Elders from four of the five Ogaden zones told consistent reports of hangings of civilians, branding people, gang rape, arbitrary detentions and killings, forced conscription, and denial of access to food and water resources. These, combined with consistent reports from elsewhere in the region over the past few months, paint a picture of the horror inflicted on the civilian population as part of Ethiopia's counter-insurgency against the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). End Summary.

FEAR OF MEETING

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¶12. (C) In light of the noticeable GoE presence at the gathering the Ogaden was barely mentioned in conference plenary sessions. Ogaden elders expressed fear that the GoE would punish them for contacts with EmbOffs but nonetheless were eager to meet with EmbOffs discreetly. The elders said that much of their information was dated because they were in exile or hiding in cities in the Ogaden, events having occurred between January and September 2007. They insisted conditions in the Ogaden have not improved. It was very difficult to elicit specific names, times and dates of incidents of human rights abuses. The elders did not express any fear of terrorism or extremism in their areas but, rather, clearly saw the GoE and the ENDF as a real threat to their safety.

A LITANY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

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¶13. (C) The common refrain from Ogaden elders was "it would take two days to tell you the horrors we have seen. We are seeing things now that we have never seen before." The Ogadeni elders blamed the ENDF for a number of ongoing human rights abuses in the Ogaden, including: 1) hanging/strangulation by wire; 2) "branding" of people with

hot irons and hiding the branded people in dog kennels; 3) arbitrary detention; 4) arbitrary killings of civilians; 5) collective punishment, including denial of access to food and water sources; 6) forced conscription of civil servants. When asked what effects the ENDF tactics have had on Ogadenis' attitudes toward the GoE, one Korahe elder said frankly "our only option now is separation." Other elders were less willing to be so blunt.

#### ABUSES PREVALENT THROUGHOUT THE OGADEN

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¶4. (C) Degehabur elders told EmbOffs that: 1) more than 200 Ethiopian soldiers had been killed at in the April 23 attack on the Chinese oil site in Abole; 2) clans are refusing to pay blood money, to the GoE for the deaths; 3) women were gang raped and killed by the ENDF in response to this incident; 4) the GoE is asking each community to provide 50 men for militia, but many will only muster between 10-20; 5) health workers are exempt thus far; and 6) the ENDF has been hanging people. One Degehabur elder said that in areas where the ONLF had been active, the ENDF has denied communities access to water for as many as 10 days.

¶5. (C) Warder Elders told EmbOffs that: 1) all vehicles were being stopped in their region and no food was getting in or out; 2) people are dying of hunger; and 3) there is no freedom of movement ) the ENDF kills people seeking to travel from one kebele to another. One Warder elder said that the ENDF has made a practice of walking into villages, calling everyone to a meeting, and arbitrarily killing six or seven people as a warning to others. In one case, an ethnic Somali ENDF member reportedly vomited when forced to hang

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people and was immediately killed himself (the ENDF allegedly tightened a wire around his neck until he asphyxiated). The message of the hangings to Warder elders is "You don't even deserve a bullet."

¶6. (C) Fik elders told EmbOffs that: 1) the ENDF denies people access to water; 2) thousands are dying from malnutrition; and 3) there is no freedom of movement.

¶7. (C) Korahe elders told EmbOffs that: 1) the ENDF seeks 100 camels in 'blood money' for every ENDF soldier killed; 2) villagers are too scared not to pay; and 3) people are being indiscriminately detained and forced to pay 5000 birr (roughly 550 dollars) for the release of family members. One elder said his 70 year-old cousin had been shot on suspicions of working with the ONLF. One Korahe elder also said that the ENDF is allowing food into Korahe only by military escort and has been involved in profiteering and resale of essential food and nonfood items.

#### MP ACKNOWLEDGES CONSCRIPTION

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¶8. (C) Federal Member of Parliament and Chair of parliament's pastoralist subcommittee confirmed to UK EmbOff that: 1) the GoE uses untrained and under-equipped militia to engage the ONLF; 2) the ONLF's support base appears to have increased, with some fluctuations in numbers; and 3) overzealous local ENDF leaders appear to exceed their authority. While the MP noted that Ethiopia's National Security Advisor Abay Tsehay is firmly in charge at the top, he does not 'micro-manage' about tactics on the ground.

#### COMMENT

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¶9. (C) While the lack of specific dates, names, or locations related to the acts reported by the elders renders it effectively impossible to verify or confirm any particular allegation among the host of elders' reports, the common trends reconfirm the findings conveyed privately from the

early-September UN assessment team: a clear pattern of systemic gross human rights abuses by Ethiopian government and military officials against the people of the Ogaden region. While it is certainly possible, and probably quite likely, that senior Ethiopian government officials have not sanctioned or may not even be aware of such tactics deployed, the overwhelming consistency in specific details conveyed by disparate individuals from far flung regions of the Ogaden across a period of several months leaves little doubt that the Ethiopian military has, and continues to, engage in wanton human rights abuses. End Comment.

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